Virginia's On-Time Graduation Rate and Strategies to Support More Students Persist to Graduate from High School

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Overview

- Graduation rate data
  - Background information
  - Key events in Virginia
  - Calculating Virginia's On-Time Graduation Rate
- Why do students drop out of school? A look at the research.
- How can 21st CCLCs support more students to successfully graduate?

Background: Graduation rates

- Historically, Virginia's state-published graduation rates were estimates.
- Estimates have flaws that impact reliability.
- Reliability drops with smaller groups of students.

Legislative and regulatory context

- General Assembly 2006:
  - House Bill 19 required the Board of Education to prescribe a uniform formula to assess high school graduation rates.
- November 2006:
  - BOE defined a cohort graduation rate for Virginia.
  - Report to the General Assembly stated that the cohort graduation rate would be reported for the first time in the fall of 2008.
- General Assembly 2007
  - SJR 329 required further study of graduation and dropout rates, with focus on dropout rates.
  - See http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h&sdocs.nsf/By+Year/SD162007/$file/SD16.pdf.
- October 2008:
  - Department of Education reports the Virginia On-Time Graduation rate.
  - Information reported will include data disaggregated by subgroups.

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Virginia's On-Time Graduation Rate

BOE-approved formula

$$\frac{\textbf{On-time graduates in year x}}{\textbf{[First-time entering 9th graders in year x-4) +}}$$
$$\textbf{(transfers in) – (transfers out and deceased)]}$$

- Graduates are students who earn one of five BOE-approved diplomas.
- Special education students and English language learners who have plans in place will be assigned to different cohorts.
- Deceased students will be counted as transfers-out in the denominator.
- Incarcerated students will be counted as transfers as they leave and re-enter the system.

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Virginia's On-Time Graduation Rate

Implementation in 2008

Adjusted cohort students who earn a BOE-approved diploma
no later than Summer 2008

[Adjusted cohort based on first-time entering 9th graders in 2004-2005) +
(transfers in) – (transfers out and deceased)]

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What are the adjustments?

- Students with disabilities and English language learners
  - VDOE will adjust the cohort to allow these students more time to graduate and still be counted as "on-time"
  - Such students must have completed school in 2007-2008 to be moved to the next year's cohort
- Incarcerated students
  - Followed as they move in and out of public schools.
  - Cohort will be assigned based on grade-level at re-entry into public school.

Related information

- Additional Reporting from VDOE
  - October 2008:
    - Completion rates (includes graduates and students who earn GEDs or certificates of program completion)
    - Complete count of graduates (includes students not in the 2008 cohort)
  - Spring 2009
    - Cohort dropout rate
- Proposed change to the Standards of Accreditation
  - Addition of a graduation and completion index to the SOA was proposed January 2008.
  - Change to SOA proposed for accreditation year 2010-2011, based on data from school year 2009-2010.

Why do students drop out of school?

There is general consensus that dropping out is a process of disengaging from the social or academic aspects of school, or both, and students on a path to drop out tend to give warning signals.

From: Report if the Virginia Board of Education On the Study of High School Dropout and Graduation Rates in the Commonwealth (SJR 329). http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h&sdocs.nsf/By+Year/SD162007/$file/SD16.pdf.

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What factors increase the likelihood that a student will dropout of school?

- Elementary school
  - Children with behavioral difficulties.
  - Poor attendance.
  - School performance as measured by behavior, academics, and attendance.
  - Children who repeat grades in K-4 are five times more likely to dropout of school.

- Middle and high school
  - Poor in-school behavior.
  - Failing grades in mathematics.
  - Failing grades in English.
  - Poor attendance.
  - Being retained in grade.

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Additional risk factors for high school students

- Entering ninth grade two or more grade levels behind their peers.

- Being retained in ninth grade.

- Poor transition into high school—a large percentage of high school dropouts fall "off-track" between ninth and tenth grade.

Adapted from: Bost, L. & Klare, M. (2007). National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities. http://www.ndpc-sd.org/documents/Teleseminars/Bost-071016/Policies_Procedures_teleseminar_10-16-2007.pdf

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Voices of high school dropouts*

- Classes are uninteresting
  - No apparent relevance to students lives.
  - Limited explicit connections made between school and work.
- Low motivation or not inspired to work
  - No connection with school or the academic community.
  - Unsafe environments.
- Personal reasons
- Academic challenges
  - Not necessarily the major factor for the majority dropouts.
  - Poor preparation for high school is a major factor for those who left due to academics.
- Missed school contributed to the final decision to drop out.
- Limited parental involvement supported student decisions.

"If they related to me more and understand that at that point in time, my life was...what I was going through, where I lived, where I came from. Who knows? That book might have been in my book bag. I might have bought a book bag and done some work." (Bridgeland et al., page 12).

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What we've learned from dropout prevention programs

- Research on risk factors and evidence-based programs shows important lessons learned about dropout prevention (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007):

  - The likelihood of dropping out increases as the number of risk factors increases, and prevention strategies should take this into account and target as many risk factors as possible.

  - Multiple strategies should be used to help assure program impact.

  - When practitioners adopt existing programs, research suggests the programs should be fully implemented and implemented as they were designed.

  - The strategies chosen to support at-risk students should be evidence-based, aligned with the risk factors they need to target, and grounded in best practices.

- Virginia's school divisions offer a wide variety of programs and services to students at risk of dropping out of schools.

Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J. & Drew, S. (2007). Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities In Schools, Inc.

Programs and services available in Virginia's school divisions

Number of responding school divisions that reported offering at least one program or service for students at-risk of dropping out of school			
Program Type	Elementary School	Middle School	High school
Academic	13%	18%	58%
Community outreach/resources	77%	80%	82%
Mentoring	70%	77%	80%
Psycho-social skills	79%	95%	94%
School/classroom structure	46%	76%	97%
Teacher/parent training	84%	94%	95%
Transition program	56%	73%	71%
Vocational/work	11%	21%	74%

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How can 21st CCLCs support more students to successfully graduate?

"Student Engagement is the bottom line in interventions to promote school completion."[1]

[1] Engaging students with school: The essential dimension of dropout prevention programs. National Dropout Prevention Center for students with Disabilities. January 22, 2008.

Academic engagement

- Capitalize on your partnership with the school division (or other experts) to identify students' unique academic needs:
    - Partner with schools to align your support.
    - Work with struggling students to build their literacy skills—its never too late!
    - Provide engaging and age-appropriate materials, especially for struggling students.
- Keep students engaged in learning
    - Introduce service-learning to connect meaningful community service experiences with academic learning.
    - Partner with CTE programs and the broader community (e.g., business partners)—show students how they can use what they learn.
    - Make connections between learning and students' lives.
- Establish student mentoring programs
    - Many students who drop out report that nobody cared whether they stayed in school or not.
    - Connecting with a teacher provides students with resiliency to support their success in school and life.

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Social Engagement

- Engagement in the social aspects of school are necessary for students to stay engaged in school and graduate.[1]
- Students may need additional (and intentional) supports for their social and emotional growth.
- Social and emotional learning empowers students to:
  - Recognize and manage emotions
  - Care about others
  - Make good decisions
  - Behave ethically and responsibly
  - Develop positive relationships
  - Avoid negative behaviors
- Selected areas for social and emotional competence-promotion and prevention programming
  - Alcohol and Drug Education
  - Career Education
  - Character Education
  - Civic Education
  - Health Education
  - Law-related Education
  - Multicultural Education
  - Positive Peer Bonding
  - Service Learning
  - Violence Prevention

[1] Engaging students with school: The essential dimension of dropout prevention programs. National Dropout Prevention Center for students with Disabilities. January 22, 2008.

More engagement opportunities

- Engage families as partners in their children's education. As you work with families, support their success to:[2]
  - Create home environments that encourages learning;
  - Communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and
  - Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

- Engage the broader community
  - You're at least part of the way there as a school partner through the 21st Century Learning Community Centers grant.
  - Several Virginia school division partners with local service providers to ensure that students have access to "wrap around" services.
  - Wrap around services offer students supports they need to enable them to focus on academics, and may be found in places such as:
    - Hospitals
    - Police departments
    - Non-profit organizations
    - Departments of health and social services
    - Mental health service providers

[2] Schargel, F. P., & Smink, J. (2001). Strategies to help solve our school dropout problem. (pp. 52-54). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

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Support student transitions

- Research shows that successful students can "trip" as they transition to new schools.
- Work with schools, families, and the community to provide students with smooth transitions.
  - End-of-year and summer transition programs for students entering middle and high school.
  - Make efforts to support successful transitions for students who move schools and districts mid-year, or in years that are not transitions within the system.
- Work with families to help them navigate the school system—so they can effectively support their children.

The best way to "fix problems" is to engage youth as problem-solvers. And all young people need and deserve access to opportunities to learn, make a difference, and overcome the problems they face. Pittman et al. (2001)

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Questions?

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